

INDOCHINESE REFUGEE OUTFLOW, 1977-1980

SUMMARY

Based on recent trends and likely future political and economic factors, we believe that about 60,000 people are likely to flee Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam between July 1, 1977-December 31, 1980. Unforeseen developments could significantly alter this estimate.

Estimated Refugee Flight from Indochina

(July 1977 - December 1980)

1. Projection based on seasonal variations	52,700-62,000
2. Adjustments based on effects of policies of other countries	2,600- 3,100
3. Adjustments based upon factors in each country:	
--Laos	+(0-4200)
--Cambodia	-(1200-900)
--Vietnam	-(800- 0)
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TOTAL	53,300-68,400

Current surveys of Thai refugee camps indicate that about 11,000 refugees would meet US parole criteria during the period examined. Those fleeing Vietnam will make up more than half of this total with nearly all of the remainder from Laos.

This memorandum was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for East Asia and the Pacific by Tom Miller, State/INR. It was coordinated at the working level by representatives of State/INR, CIA, and DIA. Copies have been provided NSA and intelligence organizations of the military services.

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Some legal immigration from Vietnam is now taking place; appreciable increases could result from agreements between the Indochina countries and third countries (including the US) on family reunification or liberalization by the Indochina countries toward legal emigration.

Seasonal Variations

1. A monthly average of 1200-1500 refugees, principally from Laos but including a small number from Cambodia, and 500 from Vietnam fled in the first six months of 1977. If one assumes all major factors influencing flight will remain constant through 1980, it is still crucial to introduce into the projection the large influence of seasonal variation. The monthly average of Lao fleeing to Thailand was about double during the December-June (1976-1977) dry season compared to the monthly average of the preceeding rainy season months. Several explanations account for higher refugee flight during the dry season. For those fleeing Laos:

- the Mekong River is at lower levels with a slower current and easier to cross;
- farmers run short of cash and/or barter goods by the middle of the dry season and they have less work to do;
- economic activity in the river towns slows down;
- schools are closed during part of the dry season.

2. Vietnamese fleeing by boat find the hazards of the typhoon season a major obstacle for their small, ill-equipped boats on the open seas. Only Cambodian refugees, and some Lao in southern Laos who must travel through usually dry forests to escape across the Thai border, would see any benefits at all to fleeing during the rainy season. However, as will be discussed later, the future obstacles to flight from Cambodia are so formidable that covering weather would play only a minor role.

3. The time period in this projection covers three dry seasons and four rainy seasons. Therefore, if we assume all other factors influencing flight to remain constant, we can use past trends to project flight by Indochinese refugees from July 1, 1977 to December 31, 1980:

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Country of Origin*

	Laos	Cambodia**	Vietnam	Total
Dry (December-June)				
1978	7,560 - 9,450	840 - 1,050	3,500	11,900 - 14,000
1979	7,560 - 9,450	840 - 1,050	3,500	11,900 - 14,000
1980	7,560 - 9,450	840 - 1,050	3,500	11,900 - 14,000
Subtotal	22,680 - 28,350	2520 - 3,150	10,500	35,700 - 42,000

Season

Rainy (July-November)				
1977	2,700 - 3,375	300 - 375	1,250	4,250 - 5,000
1978	2,700 - 3,375	300 - 375	1,250	4,250 - 5,000
1979	2,700 - 3,375	300 - 375	1,250	4,250 - 5,000
1980	2,700 - 3,375	300 - 375	1,250	4,250 - 5,000
Subtotal	10,800 -13,500	1,200 -1,500	5,000	17,000 - 20,000
	33,480 -41,850	3,720 -4,650	15,500	52,700 - 62,000

4. However, the factors influencing flight over the next three and one-half years will probably not be identical to those factors which have affected refugee flight during the past two years.

* This analysis treats the country from which the refugee departs rather than his ethnic background. Thus, Vietnamese, Thai Dam and Cambodians fleeing from Laos will be grouped in the totals from Laos. Cambodians leaving by boat from Vietnam are grouped in the Vietnam refugee totals. Not surprisingly, there are few ethnic Lao or Vietnamese who escape from Cambodia.

** It is estimated that 90 percent of the Lao-Cambodia refugees will be from Laos with the remainder from Cambodia.

Possible Factors Affecting Refugee Flight Through 1980

All of Indochina -- Effect of Policies of Other Countries

5. The numbers of refugees illegally fleeing Indochina can fluctuate because of policies of other countries. Word of the US decision to admit 15,000 more refugees, for instance, will surely give hope to those who are undecided whether to leave because they thought they had little chance of eventually reaching the US. Similar expanded admission programs by France or other countries would have a similar multiplier effect on the numbers of refugees fleeing Indochina. Also, with thousands of more family linkage combinations possible, the number of people fleeing over the next three and a half years to rejoin their families will increase.

6. A major change in the policies of Southeast Asian countries toward Indochinese refugees could also have a significant impact on the numbers who flee through 1980. For instance, Prime Minister Thanin said August 4 that Thailand should think about repatriating the refugees. Even though such a suggestion is not presently realistic given the poor relationship Thailand has with its Indochina neighbors, if it was ever even seriously considered, many refugees (especially Cambodians) would think twice before departing. On the other hand, a policy by Thailand and perhaps even other Southeast Asian nations to permanently resettle Indochinese refugees would encourage further emigration from Indochina. Unusual weather conditions may have either a retardant or stimulative effect on refugee flight.

7. On balance, such factors seem more likely to cause an increase of about 5% in the numbers of refugees fleeing over the next three and a half years.

Laos

8. Most of the projected 33,480-41,850 refugees leaving Laos through 1980 will probably be Hmong (Meo) tribesmen who in the past have crossed the Mekong River into the northeast Thai provinces of Loei and Nongkhai and lowland Lao who have left from Vientiane and areas as far south as Paksane. A few of the refugees leaving Laos have been Vietnamese who lived in Vientiane and Lao provincial towns along the Mekong and Khmer ex-soldiers, shopkeepers, and peasants who entered Thailand through southern Laos.

9. Factors which may increase flight from Laos over the next three and a half years include:

- Food Shortages and the Government's Failure to Effectively Respond to These Shortages. Several sources indicate Laos is presently experiencing severe food shortages in many parts of the country. Thus far the government has been ineffective in dealing with this problem which is only partly caused by the recent drought. Improved weather conditions may alleviate but will not resolve the food shortage problems. Moreover, Laos must feed the 25,000-man Vietnamese army in Laos and ship rice and other food to Vietnam as "repayment" of its war debts.
- An Increase in Government Control and Repression. One source indicates there are presently an estimated 30,000 people in reeducation camps (one percent of the total population) in Laos. Most of the prisoners -- whether they are released or escape -- must be considered likely potential candidates for flight. Any new government efforts to round up large numbers of opponents to the regime would probably result in increased flight by those who felt they were likely targets.
- Government Defeat of Resistance Forces and Their Supporters. The Hmong and other groups presently in armed resistance to the government appear to be more effective now than a year ago. However, because more Vietnamese troops have been introduced into Laos to counter the resistance, their fortunes could change overnight and they and their families could be forced to flee to Thailand. Moreover, government frustration in its efforts to quell domestic resistance may lead it to take repressive action against the Hmong and other elements of the population it considers sympathetic to the resistance; those threatened would opt to flee rather than wait to be selected for reeducation.

- Government Efforts to Speed the Pace of Socialization in the Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Sectors. Thus far the Lao government has moved cautiously in attempting to collectivize agriculture. Any precipitous move -- considered unlikely at this time -- to move toward large-scale collectivization of agriculture would result in increased flight. The government has abolished large elements of the capitalist market system in Vientiane and in other larger towns. However, despite recent attempts to curtail the open market, it still flourishes. Government attempts to curtail this market mechanism would result not only in the flight of those engaged in open market activities, but also of people in those towns who are dependent on the open market to supplement their meager government rations.

10. In contrast, factors which would decrease the outflow of refugees from Laos through 1980 include:

- Security Along Parts of the Mekong River. Most Lao seeking refuge in Thailand must cross the Mekong River. In addition to this formidable natural obstacle, those who flee from the Vientiane area into Nongkhai Province must also elude government security patrols who in the past have shown no hesitation to open fire on people crossing the Mekong. The US Consul in Udorn estimates the Pathet Lao military has killed or wounded several dozen potential escapees over the past twelve months.
- An improvement in the food situation, decrease in government control and repression, reduction in resistance, and/or increase in the popularity in government administration - all of which are considered unlikely - could lead to reductions in the rate of flight from Laos.

11. The factors favoring an increase in Lao refugees far outweigh those limiting flights. Thus, it appears that there will be a continued high level or even elevation in the number of

people who flee Laos over the next three and a half years. Food shortages are already a fact of life and many of the Lao refugees presently in Thai resettlement camps claim they fled for economic as well as political reasons. Government political repression, the prospect of a decline in the armed resistance in Laos, and government programs to collectivize the economy are also likely possibilities which could compel many to flee over the next three and a half years.

12. While security forces patrolling along the banks of the Mekong may improve, we estimate that the number fleeing from Laos through 1980 will be either stable or may increase by as much as 10 percent.

Summary of Projected Refugee Flight from Laos
(July 1977 - December 1980)

33,500 - 41,900	-- projection based upon rainy/dry season dichotomy
+(1,700 - 2,100)	-- represents estimated five percent increase based on policies of other countries toward refugees
+(3,300 - 4,200)	-- represents 0-10 percent increase based on factors affecting refugee flight within Laos

TOTAL 35,200 - 48,200

Cambodia

13. Refugee flight from Cambodia has declined to a trickle. Reliable information on conditions within Cambodia is extremely difficult to obtain and little is known of about those factors which may influence refugee flight through 1980. We do know that most refugees who left Cambodia fled in 1975 and early 1976. The downward curve of monthly refugee flight since then has been quite steep. Despite reports of hardship, various internal factors will make refugee flight to Thailand difficult over the next several years, thus continuing the steep decline:

-- High Risk of Getting Caught and Severely Punished. The combination of Cambodian

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security patrols along the border, extensive passive restraints (mines, punji stakes, etc.), and betrayal by hired guides will make escape more difficult in the future. Reports of death as a punishment for attempted escape will act as a deterrent to future flight.

- Inaccessibility of Large Portions of the Population to Escape Routes. Most of the 4,200 Khmer in the Surin refugee camp in Thailand came from the northwest provinces of Oddar Meanchey, Siem Reap, and Phrea Vihear and crossed into the northeast Thai provinces of Buriram, Surin, and Sisaket. As Cambodian security controls over travel have increased, it has become more difficult for inhabitants from other regions to travel undetected through the country on their way to Thailand. Thus, the population of potential refugees must essentially be drawn from a smaller base in the Northwest. Furthermore, many sections along the Thai-Cambodia border have been declared "no-man's" land, making travel for the last 15-20 kilometers particularly hazardous. Even if Thai-Cambodian border tensions decrease, it appears crossing into Thailand will remain difficult.
- Physical Weakness of the People. Large segments of the Khmer population now suffer from disease and malnutrition and are in a generally weakened state. If this continues, over time an increasing number of people who may want to escape will be physically unable to do so and most will probably not even make the attempt.

14. The one factor which could lead to an increase in refugee flight from Cambodia would be widespread morale problems within the Cambodian military which could cause a breakdown in border security and/or defections of the military and their families to Thailand. Even though there reportedly have been a few isolated cases of breakdown in discipline in the military, widespread disaffection is not likely as long as the Cambodian soldier continues to enjoy living standards above the norm and feels constrained by the threat of group sanctions.

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15. Based on the above factors, it is estimated refugees flight from Cambodia will probably decrease by at least one-fourth over the next three and a half years. Some may opt to flee to neighboring Laos or Vietnam where they will settle; only a few of these will subsequently flee to third countries.

Summary of Projected Refugee Flight from Cambodia
(July 1977 - December 1980)

3,700 - 4,700 -- projection based on rainy/
dry season dichotomy
+ (200) -- represents estimated five
percent increase based on
policies of third countries
- (1,200 - 900) -- represents 25 percent decrease
based on factors affecting
refugee flight within Cambodia

TOTAL 2,700 - 3,800

Vietnam

16. Vietnamese escaping in boats not only risk detection (one report indicated 80 percent of escape attempts in one southern province were foiled by SRV authorities) but also undertake considerable risks by setting out in the open sea in small, dilapidated boats with inadequate provisions. Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons why the current monthly rate of 500 refugees fleeing the southern part of the SRV will remain stable or decrease slightly through 1980:

-- General Economic Conditions are Worsening.
Food shortages, partly induced by a severe drought, are worse than in previous years. Many people remain unemployed and basic necessities become harder to obtain. Because many "boat cases" in the past left Vietnam more because of economic hardship than political repression, it appears likely that poor economic conditions will become an even greater reason for flight in the next year. An improvement in the economy could reduce the stimulus for flight in 1979-80. However,

while present economic conditions may induce more to try to escape, it will also give potential refugees less of a chance to stockpile supplies for a voyage that may take weeks. Therefore, those Vietnamese who feel they must flee in the immediate future will leave with inadequate provisions and increase the risk of perishing at sea.

- Government Economic and Security Policies.
Government programs to send hundreds of thousands of southern urban dwellers to new economic zones, quicken the pace of collectivization of southern agriculture, complete the nationalization of the industrial sector, give all 18-25 year olds the choice of serving in the military or in new economic zones, and repress certain religious groups will compel an increasing number of southerners to flee Vietnam over the next year. If these programs eventually succeed in improving conditions for people in the South, they could have the effect of reducing the rate of flight in 1979-80.

17. Increased SRV security over travel within the country, along probable coastal embarkation areas, and at sea will deter future refugee flight. The SRV has increasingly been effective at infiltrating escape attempts and rounding up dozens of potential escapees at once rather than one or two at a time. Stockpiling of food, fresh water, fuel and other essentials has become more difficult. Many fishing boats which used to serve as an escape vehicle have been nationalized and, as an added precaution, the boats are only allowed to carry enough fuel for one day of fishing.

18. Also, a large part of the potential pool of educated, able-bodied Vietnamese who may have been associated with the former regime has already fled, leaving those who may be less willing to risk the effort regardless of the situation.

19. Based on the factors cited above, it is estimated refugee flight from Vietnam will remain stable or decrease slightly (by five percent) through 1980.

Summary of Projected Refugee Flight From Vietnam
(July 1977 - December 1980)

15,500 -- projection based on rainy/dry season dichotomy

+(800) -- represents estimated five percent increase based on policies of other countries toward refugees

-(800-0) -- represents five percent decrease based on factors affecting refugee flight within Vietnam

TOTAL 15,500 - 16,300

Escapees Who Meet Criteria for Parole

20. Because we have no way to predict the background and family ties of any future refugee group, one approach to derive an estimate of the members eligible for parole would be to assume that future refugees will be roughly analogous to past escapees. By juxtaposing the percentage of each ethnic group in the five refugee camps in Northeast Thailand which fall into one of the three parole categories against the projected flow of refugees, one can derive a rough estimate of the quantities of future refugees from Laos and Cambodia who will meet US criteria for parole.* The percentage used to calculate those Vietnamese eligible for parole are derived from surveys of "boat cases" furnished by D/HA.

<u>Country of Origin</u>				
	<u>Laos (N=41,641)</u>	<u>Cambodia (N=3013)</u>	<u>Vietnam (N=16037)</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Category</u>				
I. Expected %	2.3	1.7	140	
Total Eligible	959	56	2,198	3,213
II. Expected %	2.9	0.4	4.0	

* The obvious problem with this approach is that it assumes ethnic composition is the same as the country of origin. Vietnamese and Cambodians fleeing through Laos or Cambodians going through Vietnam illustrate the problems of operating under such an assumption. Nevertheless, such a procedure is acceptable for deriving gross estimates.

Total Eligible	1,209	1	628	1,838
III. Expected %	5.4	4.2	22.0	
Total Eligible	2,252	139	3,454	5,845

Total Eligible	4,420	196	6,280	10,896
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Explanation of categories:

- I. Closely related to someone in the US.
- II. Former employees of the US government.
- III. Those whose positions in the civil and military services of their homeland brought them in close association with US policies, programs, and personnel.

A systematic annual survey of refugee backgrounds in 1978, 1979, and 1980 would allow corrections to be made to the above estimates.

Legal Emigration

21. We cannot estimate how many people might legally depart the Indochinese states through 1980. Some legal emigration at the rate of a few hundred persons per month from Vietnam has long been taking place, especially to France and Hong Kong. Many of those permitted to leave are foreign nationals, but ethnic Vietnamese have been permitted to leave, usually on the basis of citizenship in another country or a close relationship to a foreign national or in some cases to another ethnic Vietnamese with foreign citizenship.

22. These numbers could grow considerably as the result of possible agreements between any of the Indochinese countries and other foreign states willing to permit the Indochinese to immigrate. Agreements between the United States and Vietnam have the most potential impact given the large number of Vietnamese refugees in the US and the pull that they could exert on family members in Vietnam.

23. Some kind of agreement between the United States and Vietnam, either specifically for family reunification or incorporating provisions for family reunification is not improbable, considering each country's apparent interest in the

normalization of relations. Laos may be involved, but to date there are fewer indicators of possible interest by the Laotian authorities. Cambodia should be assumed not to liberalize emigration regardless of its objective circumstances.

24. Last March, a senior representative of the SRV said that Hanoi would be "generous" with regard to Vietnamese citizens wishing to join relatives in the US, and to those wanting to return to Vietnam from abroad, providing they follow the proper procedures. This implies that Hanoi is aware that the longing of Vietnamese in the United States to be reunited with their families could make this a humanitarian issue in the United States, and that Hanoi may be willing to cooperate under certain conditions. The Vietnamese statement could also imply that Hanoi would like to get rid of some of these people if a face saving formula could be found. Food shortages, unemployment, lack of political trustworthiness, and a desire for enhancement of its international image are all factors that could play a part in Vietnamese decisions.

25. The People's Republic of China apparently relaxed its security procedures in the past to allow escapes to Hong Kong of people considered unproductive. This occurred during food shortages in China. Food shortages in Vietnam and/or Laos could provide an impetus to either relax security procedures or to permit legal emigration. Hanoi would be likely to prefer legal emigration as part of an agreement from which it derived as many benefits as possible.

26. On November 6, 1965, the President announced procedures and means for the movement of Cuban refugees to the United States. Castro let some 260,000 people out of Cuba on the resulting airlift. This suggests that normalization of relations with Vietnam may not be a prerequisite for legal emigration. Greater publicity on the plight of separated families may generate more interest in the US.

27. When the airlift started, there were roughly 350,000 Cuban refugees in the United States. This number served as a magnet to draw in an additional some 260,000 relatives on the airlift. This was in spite of the fact that Castro-officially proscribed persons aged 15 to 26 and certain technicians, and unofficially harassed others trying to leave, after the emigration reached embarrassing dimensions. Although some 130,000 Vietnamese refugees in the US are numerically inferior to the aforementioned Cuban figures, the Vietnamese would be drawing from a home population of some 50 million compared with fewer than 10 million Cubans at the time of the airlift.

28. There is ample evidence that all of the Indochinese refugees in the United States put a very high priority on family reunification. One voluntary agency involved in resettlement operations, has received some 6,696 written requests from Vietnamese refugees for assistance in getting relatives out of Vietnam. Most were men requesting wives both with and without children. Several hundred were women requesting husbands with or without children and parents requesting unmarried children.

29. The Refugee Task Force of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has received more requests for information on family reunification than on any other topic. Furthermore, family reunification continues to be a primary topic of concern and inquiry among the some 141 Indochinese Associations in the United States.

30. Another factor that may bear on the numbers of refugees which may come into the United States by 1980 is that many refugees will soon be able to petition for close relatives to enter the United States under current immigration law. It appears that adjustment of status legislation for the Indochinese refugees to become permanent resident aliens will soon be passed. The refugees will then be able to petition for spouses and unmarried sons and daughters. The aforementioned 6,696 requests received by one voluntary agency for assistance in getting people in these categories out of Vietnam, probably represent a small part of the number who could and would make such requests if they felt that there was little danger in making such a request and/or they felt that the request had some realistic chance of success. Normalization and/or agreements would reduce perceived danger, and enhance optimism regarding success.

31. Another legal factor which could influence the number of refugees coming into the United States is whether or not the 20,000 limit per country, per year, for countries in the eastern hemisphere would be adhered to.

32. In the event that an agreement was worked out between the US and the SRV and/or Laos for family reunification, there is a chance that the term 'immediate relatives' would be as liberally defined as it was for the Cuban airlift or is now for the boat cases. In this case the numbers would be even greater.

33. It seems reasonable to assume that as security measures limit the ability of people to escape, that legal emigration may at first supplement and later greatly exceed

escape as a source of new refugees from Vietnam and possibly Laos. In the US a sense of humanitarian obligation for the victims of American policy failure, along with other domestic and international factors may dispose the United States to cooperate in a family reunification plan, or even to seek one. From a humanitarian standpoint, this would be desirable and in keeping with the President's emphasis on human rights. Pragmatically, some contingency planning for legal immigration through 1980 should take place.

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